



CONSERVATION UPDATE 98 ROD GRAMS

UNITED STATES SENATOR ■ MINNESOTA

Dear Friends:

Since my election to Congress in 1992, I have been an advocate for balancing the need for environmental protection with our reliance upon economic growth to maintain our standard of living. Far too often, those two laudable goals are intermixed in combative rhetoric which only serves the extremes in our society.

The issues and initiatives you will find in this newsletter represent a small portion of the matters we are currently addressing in the United States Senate. They are issues I believe are important to people throughout our great state. In Minnesota, we have a unique understanding of the value of both rural and urban areas. We are perhaps alone in our diversity of culture, opinion, landscape, and way of life. That is why issues of environmental concern are so important to us and why we must be ever vigilant of the consequences of our actions.

I hope you find this newsletter helpful towards your understanding of what is happening in your nation's capitol. I welcome any comments, both positive and negative, and encourage you to contact my office at any time with your thoughts and concerns. I often say that Minnesotans are the true experts on the issues, and I rely upon them for guidance in the United States Senate.

Sincerely,

Rod Grams
United States Senator

MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY DUCK SEASON

Earlier this year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) denied a request by States of the Lower Mississippi Flyway to extend their duck season. Because of opposition by the Upper Mississippi Flyway, including the State of Minnesota, the USFWS denied their request and refused to alter any duck seasons in the Mississippi Flyway. Unfortunately, Mississippi Senators Trent Lott and Thad Cochran inserted the extension language into the 1999 Fiscal Year's Omnibus Appropriations Bill -- a bill I voted against. In addition, I wrote to Senate Appropriators and asked them to exclude this language which had never been introduced or debated in the Senate. I am committed to coming back next year and taking any necessary steps to ensure this is not repeated in the future.

MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

I was proud to support the efforts of the Refuge, the Friends of the Minnesota Valley, the Federal Aviation





Administration, and the Metropolitan Airports Commission in reaching an agreement which both allows for the expansion of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport and protects the long-term health of the Refuge. Minnesota is very fortunate to have such an impressive urban wildlife refuge and must always be vigilant in protecting that important resource. I hope the agreement and the process through which it was obtained serve as a model across the country in forming partnerships among the private sector and government agencies to both grow our economy and protect the environment.

NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT

I am proud to say that the Congress this year reauthorized the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. On April 30, I joined 55 of my colleagues in cosponsoring the reauthorization of the NAWCA. In Minnesota, NAWCA currently funds a total of 20 programs. NAWCA funding of \$18.4 million in Minnesota during its eight year history has spurred an additional \$25 million in private contributions to complete habitat projects. In 1996 alone, 1.6 million Minnesotans participated in wildlife-associated activities generating an estimated \$3.6 billion for the State's economy in both direct and indirect methods.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

In September I wrote to Secretary Glickman and urged him to fully utilize the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to its full capacity of 36.4 million acres. This would help ease the burden on some

farmers while at the same time achieve enhanced environmental goals. During the current 18th CRP sign-up period the Department of Agriculture should also give consideration to acreage which has been affected by multiple years of disaster and disease. I am also exploring the idea of a three to five-year CRP option which would allow greater management flexibility and would include the opportunity to plant a certain percentage of experimental cover crops. The CRP has been our nation's most successful conservation program since its inception and I will remain one of its most ardent supporters in the United States Senate.

VISION 2020 PARKS REFORM

Congress took a significant step forward in updating the management of our Nation's parks and improving visitor services by passing the "Vision 2020 National Park System Restoration Act," a bill I cosponsored on March 17, 1998. The Vision 2020 Bill, authored by Senator Craig Thomas of Wyoming, is a modest, common-sense approach to improving both the management and facilities of National Parks by bringing everyone to the table and seeking consensus. The Thomas Parks Bill is an important first step toward bringing accountability to park management, addressing the tremendous backlog of park projects, and improving visitor services.

BWCAW

In 1995, I joined Congressman Oberstar by introducing legislation to restore motorized portaging in the BWCAW consistent with the promises made in 1978 to the people of northern Minnesota. I am proud to say that next year motorized portaging will finally return to Trout Lake and Prairie Portages in the BWCAW. This agreement moves a long way towards restoring the 1978 agreement and bringing stability to northern Minnesota. We must also remember that the agreement may actually reduce motorized use in the BWCAW. The compromise legislation does not increase motorized permits for the portages in question and removes motorized access to both Canoe and Alder Lakes.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

I am troubled by the proposal to list the Canada Lynx as a threatened species in Minnesota. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has resisted listing the Lynx for years, but was forced into this process through court action by extremists who want to cordon off our public lands. I have written twice to the USFWS asking them to grant a 90-day extension

to the public comment period and to conduct a public hearing in Minnesota. Since 1973, the USFWS has listed over 1,500 species but removed only 27 -- only 4 of which were a direct result of recovery methods. Unfortunately, the intent of Endangered Species Act is noble and worthwhile, but its record is ripe with abuse and extremely low on success stories. Clearly, something must be done which ensures the actual recovery and delisting of endangered species.

NORTHWEST ANGLE:

I was stunned to learn of the actions of Ontario earlier this year when they imposed an unfair, and unprecedented limit on anglers fishing in Canada but returning to Minnesota resorts. The resort owners and anglers of the Northwest Angle have been unfairly disadvantaged by Ontario's one-sided decision. That is why I have repeatedly written to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright seeking the assistance of both the Department of State and the International Joint Commission in finding a resolution to this dispute. I do not believe we can continue to see decisions made by either Ontario or the State of Minnesota which foster mistrust and unfairly impact innocent citizens of either country.

HUNTING AND FISHING: A MINNESOTA EXPERIENCE

There are several important days each year that, for as long as I can recall, Minnesotans have anticipated with a ritual of anxious waiting and methodic preparation. In those hours prior to the fishing or duck openers, or the days leading up to the start of the deer hunting season, Minnesotans throughout the state can be found reeling their reels, stocking their tackle boxes, cleaning their guns, and readying their boats. Our roads leading north are a virtual convoy of trucks and boats, with our sportsmen and women on a mission — a mission handed down through decades of family outings and friends gathering for sport.

In Minnesota, hunting and fishing are a way of life. These activities bring families together and keep alive a culture fostered through generations of our ancestors. Few activities in our state's history have so consistently remained cornerstones of our character and pillars of our economy. It's for these reasons that we recognize the importance of hunting and fishing to our state in celebrating September 26 as National Hunting and Fishing Day.

As all Minnesotans know, young and old alike await

with great anticipation the arrival of spring and fall and the sporting seasons that arrive with them. In the spring, Minnesotans are in their boats prior to midnight on the walleye opener and cast their lines as soon as it's legally possible. Governor Arne Carlson has made the walleye opener a fixture of his eight years in office. I spent this year's opener in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and was lucky enough to catch what I consider a "whopper." Nonetheless, the spirit of the day and the camaraderie I experienced said more about the importance of hunting and fishing as a communal event in our state than it did about the size of the catch.

That's why we so ardently protect our right to hunt and fish and why we continue to watch over our lakes, rivers, and adjacent lands with such vigilance. Minnesotans have a unique vision of the importance of environmental protections to the health and vitality of our wildlife and fish populations. We're at the forefront in protecting our wetlands and wildlife refuges. We're among the leaders in placing land into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Minnesota was the second state in the nation to engage in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which will place up to another 100,000 acres into the CRP and Reinvest in Minnesota programs. And we continue to look for new ways to protect those resources well into the future for our children and grandchildren.

That's why I joined several of my Senate colleagues last year in cosponsoring the "Sportsmen's Bill of Rights Act" and the "Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act." Both bills reaffirm our nation's commitment to



access and fairness for sportsmen and women to public lands and acknowledge the breadth of participation in hunting and fishing activities. In fact, 36 million Americans age 16 and older participate in fishing and 14 million Americans age 16 and older take part in hunting — numbers that more than justify congressional action to preserve those activities.

The latest effort on the state level to protect our resources and our way of life is an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution to ensure the state's commitment to hunting and fishing. The amendment, offered by Senator Bob Lessard of International Falls, passed easily as a statewide ballot initiative this past November. Senator Lessard's amendment deserved the support of all Minnesotans and passed overwhelmingly because it struck at the core of what our state represents.

Your representatives, both in Washington and in Minnesota, need to rally around these initiatives because in the woodlands surrounding Ely, the lakes bordering International Falls, the duck slews near Willmar, and rivers great and small throughout the state, Minnesotans of all backgrounds will continue to hunt and fish. Through hunting and fishing, families find a common bond and a shared hobby. They come to learn that no matter the difficulties of life or the hectic pace of the week, there's still a place where our history is sustained and our traditions flourish. They discover the glory of our natural resources and further their understanding of the natural world.

As I travel the state and talk with Minnesotans, one theme remains constant no matter party affiliation or geographical location: they hold close their time away from work and their time with their families. Minnesotans cherish their trips to the lake and their walks in the woods and they tell me they'll do so as long as they live. Few activities in which we participate can last a lifetime and span generations as hunting and fishing do. And that's exactly why we should celebrate this week and all it represents, and ensure that the rights of Minnesotans to hunt and fish are forever protected.

CONCLUSION

Your input is vital to the success of these and other initiatives Congress may consider, and, as always, I encourage you to contact me with your comments and suggestions.

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